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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004754

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD GOVERNATE: THE ISSUES, THE LEADERS,  
POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

11. (C) Summary: Baghdad's prevailing political and security issue remains sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a, including the spreading influence of the Jash al Mahdi (JAM) militia. Many families continue to leave Baghdad, including doctors, educators and business owners, leaving critical shortages of skilled workers in many fields. Provincial government leaders have some influence, though they are perceived by many locals as puppets for senior SCIRI leadership. CF and IA-imposed security will be key and, over time, could contribute to economic improvements and restored faith in local government institutions. This is one of a series of cables issued by the US Embassy Baghdad in conjunction with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams analyzing the issues in each province, the leaders, and proposing possible steps forward. End summary.

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POLITICAL / SECURITY ISSUES  
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12. (C) Sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a is the overwhelming political and security issue in Baghdad. Rocket, mortar, shooting, IED and VBIED attacks occur daily and throughout the city and province. Dozens to hundreds of people are killed, wounded or kidnapped almost every day, and recent estimates suggest that the city is now facing more than one thousand incidents of violence each week.

13. (C) There are thousands of Sunni and Shi'a internally displaced persons (IDPs) in various neighborhoods as families from each community abandon their homes for neighborhoods they perceive to be safer. Many families continue to leave Baghdad, including doctors, educators and business owners. Residents often comment on the mass exodus of the middle class from the city and its environs, leaving critical shortages of skilled workers in many fields.

14. (C) Residents do not trust Iraqi security forces, particularly the Iraqi national police believing, no doubt accurately, that they are often complicit in sectarian violence.

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ECONOMIC ISSUES  
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15. (C) Businesses are unable to open on a regular basis and often do so only for a few hours at a time. Retail establishments, factories and other workplaces are often the targets of insurgent or militia attacks. Frequent curfews, street closures, and urban fighting prohibit many of the components of normal life -- most residents are essentially confined to their homes.

¶6. (C) There are critical shortages of some foodstuffs and cooking oil. Electricity and potable water are limited. The lack of basic services and the government's inability to complete or secure infrastructure projects is a frequent complaint of both citizens and local council members.

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KEY POLITICAL FIGURES  
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¶7. (C) Given its role as the capital, Baghdad's national government plays a fundamental, daily role in the province and in the city. Iraq's leaders are Baghdad's leaders, and this is reflected in local perceptions as well as in local institutions. Outside of the national government, Moqtada al-Sadr is the single largest political force in the province, exercising enormous authority over most of Baghdad, particularly among Sadr City's millions both through the Sadr Bureau as well as through JAM's increasingly prominent role in the province. Sunni cleric Harith al-Dari still has a significant voice among disaffected Sunnis in western and southern Baghdad toward the border with Al-Anbar province.

¶8. (C) Provincial government leadership has some influence, though they are perceived by many locals as puppets for senior SCIRI leadership, a perception with more than a grain of truth in it. Provincial Council Chairman Mu'een al-Khademi (SCIRI), Baghdad Mayor Saber al-Essawi (SCIRI), and Governor Hussein al-Tahan (SCIRI/Badr) control virtually all aspects of political life in Baghdad not under the sway of the national government or the militias.

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POSSIBLE STEPS AHEAD  
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¶9. (C) PRT contacts lament that they do not see Coalition forces patrolling their neighborhoods more frequently. In the view of these Baghdad residents, the consistent presence of U.S. troops would provide an improved sense of security, as demonstrated during the first phase of the Baghdad Security Plan in September 2006. The four initial focus areas of Operation Together Forward II saw an improved security environment until they were handed over to Iraqi Army and Police forces. It is the sense of many in Baghdad that an increase in U.S. troops would be a necessary but, on its own, would not be sufficient to reduce the violence in Baghdad over the long term.

¶10. (C) Coalition forces would be needed to secure cleared areas in Baghdad before significant gains in infrastructure construction or employment could be achieved, but increased and better-trained Iraqi forces under a unified Iraqi command structure should be prepared to take over security control once rebuilding has been accomplished.

¶11. (C) Perhaps the greatest criticism of local government is that it is grossly unrepresentative of the population, both in terms of geography and identity. Conducting provincial and local elections in a manner which provides fair regional representation (e.g. each district in the city would be entitled to an allotment of seats on the Provincial Council based on population) would be a significant action to reinforce the credibility of the local government in Baghdad, something in short supply at present. Beyond representation, holding direct elections for leadership positions such as the Governor, Mayor, and Provincial Council Chairman is something many in Baghdad would support.

¶12. (C) The single biggest obstacle to reconciliation in Baghdad is the ongoing level of violence. Daily attacks erode efforts to build trust between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. Large scale reconciliation programs will take

hold only after the level of violence is reduced and residents feel safe, although there may be small to medium-sized projects that could help bring together residents at the neighborhood or district level, although no such activity could succeed with an overtly U.S. face. One option, which has been pursued on a very limited level by the U.S. Institute for Peace, has been to use Iraqi NGOs as conduits for carrying out programs that bring citizens together across sectarian lines to work together on common endeavors. Such projects are worth pursuing further, with the goal of fostering some degree of reconciliation to take place at a street level. A number of Political Section contacts have also complained about the lack of neutral media, including a non-sectarian television station. Supporting neutral and reliable sources of programming that Iraqis trust could also help reduce polarization.

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